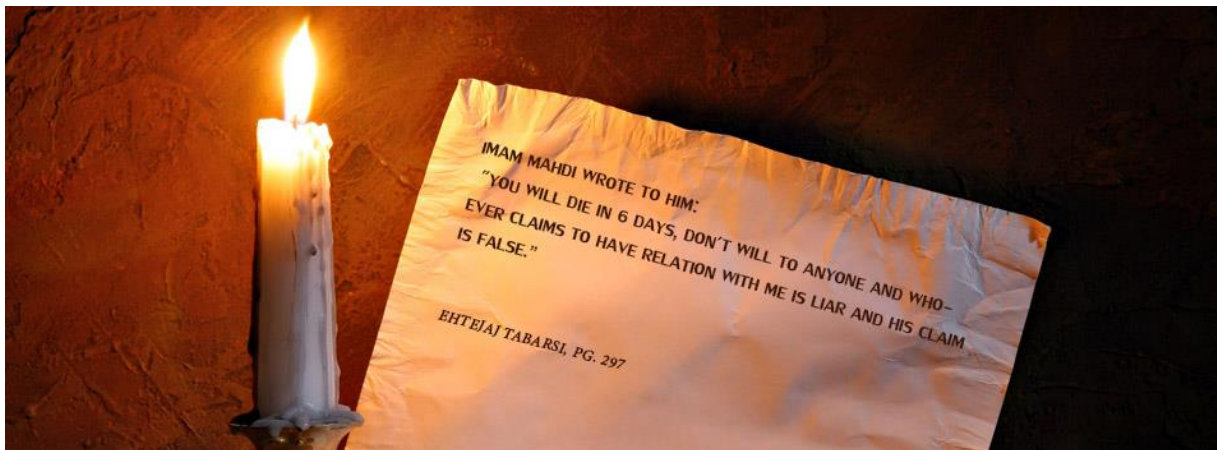




SHEYKHIEH, BEFORE BÁBISM AND BAHA'ISM



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Shi'a Muslims believe that there are 12 Imams (leader) after Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) whom the last one is Imam Mahdi (PBUH) the son of Imam Askari (PBUH). Imam Mahdi had a minor occultation¹, In this period he had four special deputies, which before the death of the fourth representative Imam Mahdi wrote to him:

“You will die in 6 days, don't will to anyone and whoever claims to have relation with me is liar and his claim is false.”

During the period of 1157 A.H to 1242 A.H, Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i as a Shi'a Muslim claimed that between the people and Imam Mahdi (PBUH) there should be a great and pious person, 4th pillar of the faith², he taught this to his students in Karbala and in his speeches he introduced himself as The Gate. This belief of Ahsa'i was heresy in Shi'a , and heresy is forbidden.

During the Shaykh's era, because of the great defeats that the people had witnessed during the wars of Iran-Russia, the state of mental depression and despair was quite common among people. That state of depression would encourage them to talk about the just ruler of Islam, the rise and remembrance of whom would exhilarate them. Shaykh Ahmad used this social ground quite well and talked about Imam Mahdi as much as he could. He claimed to be close to Imam Mahdi and able to contact him and was finally gather many followers. Before his death, Ahsa'i appointed his most capable student Sayyid Kazim Rashti as his successor.

Sayyid Kazim Rashti was a man that came from an unknown origin. His birth and upbringing was unknown to the then people of Rasht (a city in north of Iran). Rashti developed Ahsa'i's false claim regarding 4th pillar of the faith as the Gate³ of 12th Shi'a Muslim Imam. He started to look for a person whom to bestow the title of Gate in order to achieve through him all his aims. He assumed the role of a lecturer and thus was able to lure some shaken beliefs and the deviated, who became his disciples.

The most prominent of these disciples was a man named Hussain Boshru'i from Bushrawayh, a village in Khorasan in Iran. Boshru'i was a man known for slyness,

¹ Qeybat Soqra

² Rokn-e Rabe'

³ The Báb

shrewdness, craftiness and caprice. Later, he started to advertise his beliefs to attract the shaken beliefs. One of them was Umme Salame, daughter of Salih Qazwini. She was married in her early youth to her cousin but deserted her because she believed in the Shaykhism.

As a result of this she started to correspond with Kazim Rashti who was quite prolific in response, because she was just suitable for his ends, Sayyid Kazim Rashti called her in his messages 'Qurat-ul-Ayn'⁴. Later he invited her to Karbala but Rashti perished in 1259 A.H before her arrival.

In Karbala, she was hosted by Hussain Boshru'i and the rest of Rashti's disciples. She became the most orthodox of them when she publicly put her call to practice with some of Rashti's student's, they called her 'Táhirih'⁵.

Nevertheless, both Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i and Sayyid Kazim Rashti, as far as the principles of Islam were concerned, especially regarding the prophet of Islam being the seal of prophets and Imam Mahdi being the Imam who rises, had the same ideas as the Shi'ites have. (Since Bahá'is have high respect and virtuous status for these two persons, we would refer to their statements in the related chapters). Sayyid Kazim Rashti died without appointing any successor and left his Shaykhi followers without any leader. He only gave partial clues for finding the next successor, something that was not seen before in history.

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⁴ Solace of the Eye

⁵ The chaste